



State Representative

Mary Lou Dickerson

Committees:

Juvenile Justice
& Family Law - *Chair*
Children & Family Services
Transportation

Olympia Office:

P.O. Box 40600
Mod 1 Building, Rm 107
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Phone:

360-786-7860

E-mail:

dickerso_ma@leg.wa.gov

Toll-free hotline:

1-800-562-6000

TDD for hearing impaired:

1-800-635-9993

The Legislature's Internet Homepage:

<http://leginfo.leg.wa.gov>

2003

36th District Legislative Report

Dear Friends,

The Alaska Way Viaduct. Magnolia Bridge. The I-5 nightmare. Threats to transit by those who think transportation equals highways. These are among the reasons I recently requested and was granted a position on the House Transportation Committee.

My first committee action was advocating reforms to rebuild trust in how transportation issues are decided and funded. The failure of Ref. 51 last fall showed voters need stronger guarantees their tax dollars will be used wisely. The reforms I'm advocating, which have already passed the House, will ensure greater efficiency and accountability by:

1. Creating a citizen oversight panel to develop and apply specific performance measures for transportation decisions and funding.
2. Requiring thorough and *ongoing* performance audits of the Department of Transportation.
3. Abolishing the Transportation Commission and empowering the Governor to hire and fire the Secretary of Transportation. The citizens' Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation said these reforms are needed to make elected officials more accountable for transportation decisions.

Being on the Transportation Committee will also help me push for choices that make sense for us locally – such as urging state funding for the Alaska Way Viaduct and ensuring that buses, rail and other alternatives to driving alone are part of any long-term transportation plan. **I'd like to hear your thoughts on how I should use my new position on the Transportation Committee.**

You'll also see information in this newsletter on the state's budget problems and my efforts to help children and families as Chair of the Juvenile Justice & Family Law Committee. As ever, I welcome your comments and suggestions. I'm proud of our 36th District, and honored to serve you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Lou Dickerson".

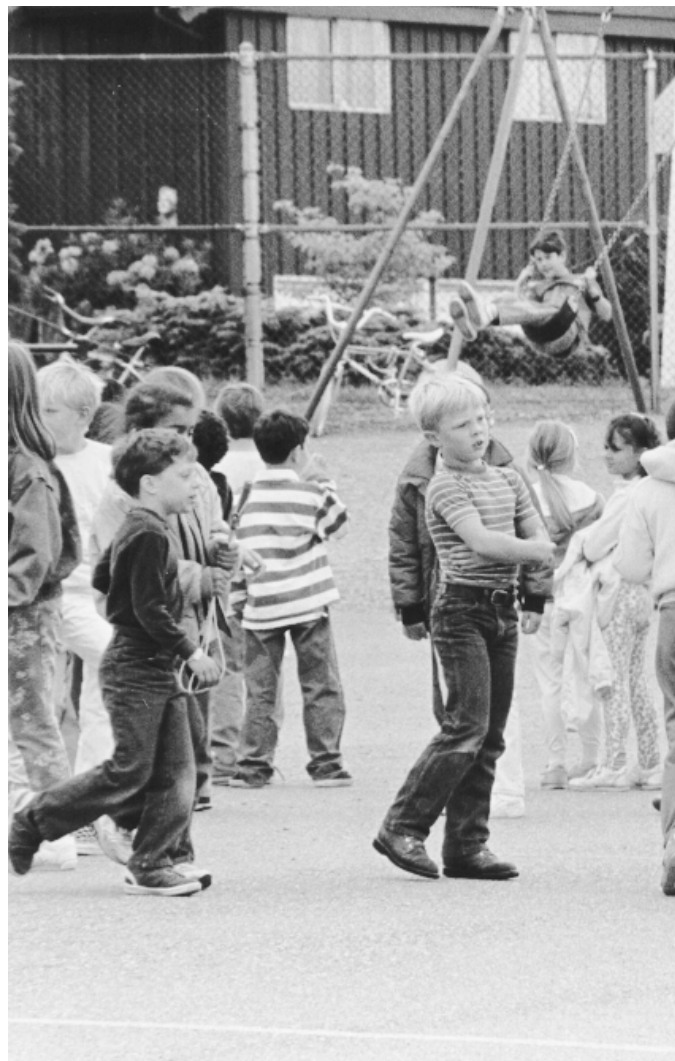
Mary Lou Dickerson

Investigating child deaths

Some people may literally be getting away with murder due to shoddy investigations of child deaths. You may remember the recent *Seattle P-I* exposé which identified more than a dozen suspicious child deaths that were never thoroughly investigated. In some cases, Children's Protective Services is not even notified when a child dies under suspicious circumstances – which obviously puts other children at risk.

The risk is most acute in counties which do not have professional medical examiners and no minimum qualifications for doing coroner's duties. One prosecutor complained the assistant coroner who investigates many deaths in his county is a licensed beautician!

To better protect children, I introduced legislation to expand the investigative authority of coroners and require prompt notification of Children Protective Services when a child dies. How many tragedies will this legislation prevent? No one can be sure, but if it prevents even one child's death or brings a murderer to justice, it should be enacted into law.



Helping parents control adult games

A recent Mothers Against Violence In America "sting operation" asked a 14-year old and two 15-year old children to see whether Seattle area retailers would sell so-called "mature" games to children. These are games the *manufacturers* say should not be played by children due to strong sexual themes or intense graphic violence.

We're talking about interactive cop-killing games and games where you earn points by having sex with prostitutes and then battering them to death with clubs.

But even though each of these games is clearly labeled "M" – meaning it is intended for mature audiences age 17 or older – 12 of the 13 stores involved in the sting operation sold the games without even asking the child's age. In one case, the store clerk told the child to lie to his parents about the game's content!

I've proposed a law to prohibit stores from selling many adult games to children without their parents' consent. Law enforcement, children's advocates, the P.T.A. and many others agree that parents need this legislation to regain control of their children's video games.

Do these ultra-violent interactive games really affect children? Ask the families of five victims who were murdered in Oakland in December and January. According to the *Oakland Tribune* (Jan. 31), One of the six youthful murder suspects confessed their random killings were inspired by the popular game Grand Theft Auto III: "We play the game by day, we live the game by night," he boasted to police.

Requiring clergy to report child abuse

We were all shocked when Church officials in Boston admitted last year to covering up the sexual abuse of children by members of the clergy. I investigated whether such a tragedy could happen here, and learned absolutely *nothing* in state law requires clergy to report child abuse.

I worked extensively with sexually abused children as the executive director of North Seattle Youth Services. I know one thing even **more** damaging to a child than sexual abuse is when the molestation is committed by someone the child sees as a symbol of goodness, trust and faith. A single terrible crime can bring a lifetime of shame and pain, and destroy faith in the very institutions we turn to for faith.

We require nurses, teachers, police and many other professions to report suspected child abuse, and this has proved extremely effective at catching child-abusers and preventing further crimes against children. But our law does not currently include clergy. It's time for Washington to join 29 other states that require clergy to report child abuse.

I've introduced legislation to include clergy among mandatory reporters of child abuse, with a narrow exception for certain confessions protected by church laws. Supporters include victims-rights advocates such as the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, prosecuting attorneys and the Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. The Washington State Catholic Conference and Washington Association of Churches also testified for the bill.



Balancing the Budget

Forty-seven states are in dire budget straits, including Washington. Here, we face a \$2.4 billion budget deficit, caused partly by the weak economy, soaring state medical costs and the financial impact of public mandates to cut taxes and increase spending.

I am deeply concerned that Gov. Locke's proposal to solve the shortfall relies almost exclusively on huge, alarming cuts to important services. The related box offers just a few examples. All these cuts are *in addition to* \$700 million cut *last year*. The cumulative blows are devastating to our priorities and to vulnerable children.

No one doubts we'll need large spending reductions this year. But relying *exclusively* on cutting services to address the budget problem would not be "balanced." A truly balanced solution should examine the spending *and* revenue sides of the fiscal crisis, and this is the only approach I can support with a clear conscience.

Some of the cuts in the governor's budget

- \$336 million by cutting the Basic Health Plan, eliminating 60,000 childless adults ineligible
- \$212 million by not funding the teacher's raises in Initiative 732
- \$180 million in cuts to public universities and colleges
- \$135 million by eliminating the Medically Indigent Program
- \$108 million by not funding the Basic Health Plan expansion funded under Initiative 773
- \$35 million cuts to nursing homes
- \$18 million in cuts to foster care, and \$12 million in adoption support
- \$7.1 million from eliminating truancy petitions
- \$7.2 million in cuts to the public schools' science and gifted programs

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Focusing the Basic Health Plan

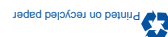
I've proposed a legal declaration that it is inappropriate to subsidize Basic Health Plan (BHP) enrollments for students who are in Washington on temporary visas when state residents are being dropped from the program due to budget shortfalls. It is important to protect the core mission of the BHP, which is to help lower-income working families gain access to affordable health insurance.



Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson

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Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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